

Singapore Sketchbook

Altars and Offerings

By Siobhan Cool



Footpath Altar

Early one morning I walked along a covered footway of shophouses and stopped beside a makeshift altar, outside the shuttered pharmacy. Last night, it must have been the scene of much prayer and worship, for ash over-spilled the incense pots and only tiny stubs of the bright red sticks remained. Geckos darted in and out from behind the prayer tablet and the incense burner stood sentinel, until its owner arrived to sweep the scene.

Fig Tree Altar

In the open green space beside the Bukit Timah wet market I stumbled upon an altar, nestled in the ring of strangler figs. The cloying incense was heavy and mingled with the wonderful scent of wet earth from this morning's downpour. Above the din of Saturday morning traffic and MRT construction works, I could still make out sweet and happy birdsong.



Bamboo Altar

Adjacent to Beauty World in Bukit Timah Road, I came across a well-kept altar at the foot of a bamboo stand. The fruit offerings had not fared well, with great chunks missing from the pineapples and the huat kueh altar cakes scattered around the perimeter. No doubt the monkeys feast at night when the ancestors are busy answering prayers. Pigeons dropped in as I sketched.

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